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SUBJECT: Charge Meets with UNHCR Regional Representative
Utkan

¶11. (SBU) The Charge met December 17 with UNHCR Regional Representative Hasim Utkan and UNHCR Vietnam Country Representative Vu Anh Son. According to Utkan, he had had a productive meeting earlier in the day with MFA Director General for Consular Affairs Bui Dinh Dinh and had focused on three issues: the UNHCR's in-country presence, the UNHCR's activities in Vietnam and a "high-level" UNHCR visit to Vietnam. On the subject of the UNHCR's presence, Utkan said that the UNHCR had identified an international staff member to serve as its representative in Hanoi. The UNHCR believed that "upgrading" its presence in this manner would send a positive message about the UNHCR's relationship with the GVN and commitment to programs in Vietnam.

¶12. (SBU) On the subject of the UNHCR's activities in Vietnam, Utkan said that the UNHCR hoped to restart some of its non-Montagnard-related in-country programs. He urged the GVN not to link these programs with any ongoing problems between the UNHCR and the GVN over Montagnards. It would thus be in Vietnam's interest to have an in-country presence regardless of the state of play in the Central Highlands to take care of other areas of the UNHCR mandate, Utkan reportedly stressed. For example, the UNHCR wished to resume its program assisting "stateless" Cambodians living in the south. Finally, Utkan told the Charge that he had discussed with DG Dinh the desire to realize a "high-level" visit to Vietnam, perhaps by the High Commissioner, sometime in 2005. Dinh reportedly responded that movement on all of these issues would depend on the state of the relationship between the UNHCR and the GVN.

¶13. (SBU) Turning briefly to the question of Montagnards in Cambodia, Utkan said that a "better mechanism" was needed to facilitate the return to Vietnam of those Montagnards who so desired. The difficult experience of dealing with the 13 Vietnamese who had qualified for resettlement but who chose instead to return to Vietnam made clear that there must be a better way to handle similar incidents. Utkan also said that, if all the parties concerned agreed, the UNHCR could establish a "more robust" UNHCR presence on the ground in Cambodian border provinces -- such as in the form of a field office.

BOARDMAN